

An Illyrian Idyll  
An Honors Thesis ( HONRS 499 )

by  
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### Abstract

I have been fascinated for some time by the story of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. There are many interesting questions that are raised but never answered in the play. For example, Orsino switches his affections instantaneously from Olivia to Viola when it is revealed that Olivia is now married and Viola is a woman (and thus available). This belies the strength of his passion for Olivia, which is certainly Shakespeare's point; Orsino was never as constant as he protested. Will his affections remain fixed on Viola now, or will they change with the next breeze? Orsino and Olivia both behave impulsively, passionately, while Viola/Cesario is the cool-headed and practical counterpoint to both of them. Will either of them ever grow up? Viola demonstrates great resourcefulness when it is required, but how will she behave when she returns to the traditional role of woman and wife?

I decided to answer some of these questions for myself by continuing the tale, writing a sequel to *Twelfth Night*. I made no serious attempt to use Shakespearean language, or to adhere to any particular time or place. Illyria is a fantasy land, where anything can happen, within the limits of the physical laws that bind our own world (no magical or supernatural incidents). My only rule was to try to remain true to the personalities of the characters as they were originally portrayed.

In order to familiarize myself with the play, I read the text, watched two filmed versions, and read books and a collection of essays about the play. Following is a list of sources that I used.

- *Twelfth Night*, by David Edland, published by Longman in 1973.
- *The First Night of Twelfth Night*, by John Leslie Hotson, published by Macmillan in 1954.
- *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Twelfth Night; a collection of critical essays*, edited by Walter N. King, published by Prentice-Hall in 1968.
- *Twelfth Night*, directed by Trevor Nunn and produced by Fine Line Features, 1996.
- *Live From Lincoln Center production of Twelfth Night*, directed by Nicholas Hytner and broadcast on August 3,

1998.

## ❧ Prologue ❧

Winters are hard in Illyria, even for the natives. Storms march down the coast with the regularity of Duke Orsino's troops pacing off the boundaries of his castle. When these gales come howling out of the north, every living thing seeks what shelter it can. Stray dogs huddle in the lee of any structure sturdy enough to withstand the wind, peasants cluster about the peat fires in their stone huts, and Orsino himself lounges on a chaise and contemplates the flames that leap on his ducal hearth. In certain moods he can be found at the top of a cliff, testing his strength against the wind and imagining the tug of the surf against his body, were he to fall. But then he allows himself to be persuaded by his entourage, who beg from a safe distance for him to come away. The duchess Viola is rarely among the entourage; she can barely stand the cold from within the castle, and refuses to bare her southern skin to the teeth of an Illyrian winter.

One evening after supper, as the two of them share a fire big enough to warm a battalion, Viola passes the time by telling stories of her native Messaline, its orange-scented breezes and warm sheltered harbors. She recalls the laughing barefoot peasant children and the flowering terrazzi and the soft rain that falls in winter there. After an hour or more of this, Orsino asks why she doesn't go home for a visit. It has been two years since the shipwreck, and none of her family save her brother were able to come for the wedding; it is natural that she should miss them and want to see them again. She demurs; the howling wind, the wicked waves. She has a dreadful fear of storms at sea, now. Oh, these storms, he says with a dismissive wave, they aren't so bad. His captains sail in these seas all through the winter. But after a glance at her ashen face, he concedes that she could probably go overland, though it would be a rough journey and take twice as long. He could spare a company of his cavalry to escort her; in fact, it would be good to give them some useful occupation - save them from gambling away their entire year's wages before spring. The more he thinks about it, the more elaborate his plans for the journey become, and the quieter sits Viola in the chair nearest the fire. He worries, sometimes, that she will actually burst into flames, so near to it she inches that chair.

Really, Orsino, she finally murmurs, I have not much family left besides Sebastien, and I see him often enough. I am sure that my old grandmother back home can wait until spring to see me. Besides, I do not think I could bear to be exposed to this cold and snow for days together, away from your warmth of your companionship. His mild annoyance at having his plan rejected is eased by her flattery, and the matter is dropped. Orsino rises from his seat to signal that it is time to retire, and the room stirs to life; a maid appears to remove the coffee things, the hounds on the rug stretch and yawn, and the butler fetches the candles to light their way to bed. Viola, though, is reluctant to leave

her seat. As her husband reaches down to help her to her feet, he is nearly scorched. God, woman, he says, would you rather be burned alive than suffer a single chill? You with your northern blood, she replies, you don't understand how this cold goes through me, how a single draft can undo all the comfort of hot tea and a warm fireside. For all her protests, though, her skin is still flushed when she arrives at her bedroom, whose well-laid fire is only slightly smaller than the one she has just left. Orsino retires to his own bedroom, where he can sleep to the lullaby of crashing surf that wafts in through his open window.

The invitations arrived on Tuesday afternoon for a party to be given on the following Saturday. Elegant calligraphy swept across the heavy cream-colored stock, requesting the honor of the recipient's presence at a costume ball to celebrate Twelfth Night. A note was scrawled across the bottom of the invitation for the duke and duchess Orsino: "Sister, We haven't seen you in weeks, so I have planned this party to tempt you from your fireside. Do exercise your famous talent for amusing costumes and help us dispel this winter gloom. Kisses, Olivia."

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"I'm sorry, my lady, but that's as tight as I can pull them."

Olivia breathed in slowly, grimacing as her flesh strained against unforgiving bone stays of the corset. She wouldn't be able to eat a thing at the party. Well, it would do her good to fast for an evening. Now, if only she could fit into her costume. She held up her arms so Sophie could slide the dress down over her head. Layers of cool silk cascaded down her body, settled on her thighs and breasts, whispered against knees and calves. Sophie went to work with the buttonhook while Olivia adjusted the flounces that outlined her cleavage. Finally she was buttoned into it. Olivia took a few shallow, experimental breaths; the buttons held. She pirouetted around the room a few times in her cold bare feet, sliding smoothly across the varnished floor. She came to a stop in front of a massive full-length mirror and surveyed herself critically.

"Well, Sophie, how do I look? Am I ravishing? Will my husband be forced to fight a duel?"

"Ah, my lady, you're a vision, you are. And if my lord Sebastien were a jealous man, as praise God he's not, the lamb, then they'd be calling for seconds before the night was out. Now come and let me do your hair, and for Lord's sake put some stockings on before you catch your death."

"But shepherdesses go barefoot all the time! I must be an authentic shepherdess."

"Not in winter, they don't. Come now, don't tease, my lady. Here are some lovely little boots for you, just the thing for chasing sheep across the mountainside."

Olivia turned from the mirror with a sigh and sat obediently at her dressing table. Sophie slipped the boots onto her mistress' feet, then began brushing the thick hair in long practiced strokes, pulling it up and back. Olivia closed her eyes and gave herself up to the caress of the hog bristles. Her long pale hands lay in her lap like sleeping birds while her thoughts flew ahead to the party. She saw the guests arriving, felt the crush of the dance floor, inhaled the heady perfume of hothouse flowers, gloated over the buffet table piled high with every kind of delicacy. And

presiding over it all was the King of Misrule, the lord of Twelfth Night, her husband Sebastien. Olivia smiled dreamily in her reverie.

Sophie slid the last pearl-headed hairpin into place and stepped back a little to gauge the effect. Olivia's rich chocolate-brown hair swept up from her creamy white skin in an elegant cascade. The antique pink silk of her gown echoed the faint flush of excitement that colored her face and upper arms. Dark eyebrows like wings arched over faintly shadowed eyelids and thick black lashes. The plumpness that made the corset so hard to lace was visible now only in a slight fullness of the upper arms and a greater definition of cleavage.

"There you go, my lady – all finished. Now, which jewelry will you wear this evening? Something simple? The pearl drops will go very nicely with your shepherd's crook, I think." Sophie held the large, faintly rosy pearl earrings against Olivia's cheek. Olivia nodded and tilted her head slightly to allow Sophie to attach the first earring. Her eyes followed the pearl as it swung slightly in Sophie's hand. She wondered what Viola would wear.

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The party was going well. Sebastien had arrived at the last minute in a roaring good humor to exchange his torn and bloody hunting clothes for green and scarlet motley. As he sat before the bedroom hearth pulling on his boots, Olivia came into the room with the rest of his costume. While she was adjusting the gilt crown on his head, Sebastien pulled her into his lap and began kissing her neck.

"How about a romp with the king, my pretty little milkmaid?"

"Sebastien! Stop – my hair!" She struggled to her feet and patted her head to make sure everything was still intact. "And I'm not a milkmaid, I'm a shepherdess. See my little crook? And I have this darling horn to call my sheep."

Olivia raised a tiny silver horn to her lips and blew a tuneless blast. The sleeping hound at Sebastien's feet leapt up with a howl and shot under his master's bed. Sebastien held his hands over his ears and rocked back in his seat.

"All right! You're a shepherdess. You can be whatever you like, if you'll just have mercy on my ears! Now, where is my sceptre? I can't be king without a sceptre."

"Here it is; but please don't go about poking people with it. Remember last year, when you thought it such a joke to lift Sir Mortimer's wig off his head at the dinner table? His wife wouldn't speak to me for months – it was very awkward when we shared a carriage all the way to the summer palace. It's all very well for you, my love; no one can ever be angry with you. But somehow they hold me responsible for your outrageous behavior."

Sebastien flashed her his most charming grin and tickled her under the chin with the tip of the sceptre.

“Fear not, my queen. I shall be your most docile lamb this evening. I’ll even wear a fleece if you like, and follow you everywhere with a silver bell about my neck.”

“That won’t be necessary. But do try not to be an idiot until the old people have gone.”

“It shall be as you command.” And he bowed low before her, and kissed her sweetly, and promised that it would be the best party of the season.

And it was. With Sebastien’s help, Olivia had turned her proper Illyrian manor into a Messaline villa. Potted trees from the conservatory and flowers from every hothouse in the district breathed summer into the rooms, while the musicians did their part between waltzes with throbbing drums and a plaintive guitar. Sebastien had advised the cook on some authentic Messaline dishes, and Olivia prayed that the liberal use of red pepper would not cause her more sensitive guests any distress. The guests were enchanted to have their cloaks taken by footmen swathed in the black robes of nomad tribesmen and their drinks fetched by veiled and sandaled housemaids.

Olivia moved among the clusters of her neighbors and friends, accepting compliments and exclaiming over costumes. She was speaking to lady Mortimer about the unseasonably calm weather when a young page rushed up to her.

“Please, madame, Gregory says to fetch you quick. There’s bandits coming up the drive!”

“Just a tardy guest, I’m sure,” Olivia assured the pale matron. “No doubt this will be a costume worth seeing. Lead on, Robin, and show me these bandits.” She bustled away, hurrying the boy before her. No doubt they were guests, but Olivia signaled a few of the larger footmen, just in case.

The windows of the front drawing room looked down on the drive; that is where Gregory and several other servants were gathered, safely concealed behind the drapery. They all looked rather shame-faced at Olivia, and stepped away from the windows to let her see. The steward Gregory stepped forward.

“Pardon me, my lady, for interrupting your merriment – but I thought you should be told. I saw them coming several miles off, with my glass.” He held out a sailor’s spyglass by way of illustration. “I thought it was just two more of your guests at first, but they came on horseback, no carriage in sight. And it’s two gentlemen, madame, that I don’t recognize.”

“Of course you don’t recognize them, Gregory; it’s a costume ball, remember?” Olivia was irritated, but still spoke gently. It would never do to give Gregory a tongue-lashing before the other servants. She stepped up to the

— window and looked out into the night. It was clear and cold, as still as an indrawn breath. The waning moon cast a shadowy light that drained the world of color and warmth. Two horses stood stamping in the courtyard, their metal shoes ringing on the stones, their breath rising in elegant plumes. Two dark figures stood beside the horses, apparently arguing with one of Olivia's stablemen. One of the horses tossed its head and began to sidle away. The taller figure snatched the reins from the drowsy groom and brought the horse to a standstill with a few economical gestures. Olivia laughed aloud and unlatched the windows. Leaning out, she called down to the shrouded figures.

“What ho, Orsino! Come inside before my servants take you for bandits and call the watch! Peter will see to your precious horse if you'll just stop shouting at him.”

He looked up, laughing, and the hood fell away from his face, and there was indeed something lawless in the flash of his white teeth and hollows of his cheeks. The smaller figure, still in shadow, lifted a gloved hand in greeting but kept its cloak pulled snugly about its shoulders.

Orsino handed the reins to the groom with a final admonition which Olivia could not hear, then strode briskly towards the front doors, shepherding his companion before him.

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By the time Olivia joined her new guests, they had removed their long outer cloaks to reveal the equally long white robes of desert tribesmen. They were dressed identically; matching robes, boots, even matching sabres sheathed in elaborately tooled leather scabbards. Turbans coiled artfully about Orsino's close-cropped dark head and Viola's honey-colored braids. His was already coming loose, trailing a loose end alongside one ear, but Viola seemed to have the knack of holding her head still as she moved about so as not to disturb the careful arrangement. Olivia offered her hand to Orsino, who bowed over it with one hand holding his headgear in place, then embraced her sister-in-law.

"Now the party may really begin," she said. "I have been waiting and watching for you, but never expected that you would arrive as nomadic horsemen. Darling, how could you bear the cold? And such clever costumes! Orsino looked absolutely barbaric out there on the lawn. But look you, sister, your husband is coming undone."

Orsino had found Sebastien and was trying to make his way across the room. He tossed his head to clear his vision of trailing turban-ends, sending whole thing went tumbling to the floor. He tried to kick it aside, and his legs became entangled in the flowing length of his robe. The other guests were watching him now; Orsino's dark cheeks flushed. He loosened the robe and pulled it off roughly, scooped the turban off the floor, and handed the whole rumpled mass to a nearby footman. He smiled and bowed to the assembled guests, saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Ali Hassan, barbarian in exile. Tribal law decrees that I may not wear my native dress until I return to my own land. Allah akbar!" The company laughed and applauded, then returned to their dancing and conversation. Orsino adjusted the cuffs of his spotless white shirt, settled the scabbard alongside his leg, then strolled easily across the room.

Watching him, Viola spoke to Olivia. "It is not so easy as it looks to walk about in long skirts, is it? He was amused by the idea of our dressing alike, and of riding horseback like real barbarians, but the game wearies him, and he dared not attempt to dance in that robe."

"But sister, how do you manage it? I know you dread the cold, yet my steward tells me you were riding like the north wind itself; and your costume is intact."

"Ah! Well, as for the costume, are not we women accustomed to moving about all day in long robes with silly adornments balanced on our heads? Besides, I wore a robe much like this one as a child in my father's house, when I first learned to ride. Our teacher was an old warrior from the desert who trained us in his style of riding and took

Sebastien and me for day-long journeys into the desert to test our skill. Sebastien could move in this attire as easily as in his own dressing-gown.

"And I hardly noticed the cold, so exciting it was to be on horseback again. I have let this tyrant winter imprison me too long inside, afraid of every breeze that might chill my skin. But I found tonight that Illyrian winter is not so different from the Messaline desert; both can be overcome with a determined will and proper attire. Oh Olivia, I cannot thank you enough for throwing this party! You have tempted me out of my hermit's cell, and I hope never to return to it."

"Then it was worth every expense," declared Olivia, squeezing her sister-in-law's hand gently. "Now go and amuse yourself. Talk to the guests, have some wine; and do be sure to speak to Sir Mortimer, I simply must see how he behaves when confronted with a woman wearing a sword."

The women parted; Olivia searched the room for strays and orphans, while Viola drifted towards the windows. After the exhilaration of the moonlight ride, she did not feel like making small talk with Olivia's guests. The moonlight on the smooth drifted snow looked remarkably like moonlight on the dunes outside her native city. The scent of the potted orange trees and the sound of the guitars had the desired effect, at least upon this guest. When Sebastien came upon his sister, she had pulled a chair behind the potted trees and was quietly sobbing into the end of her embroidered sash.

"Why, here you are at last! Isn't this the best party you've been to in ages? We've made it look just like a Messaline garden, don't you think? Why Viola, what is it? My dear sister, pray stop crying. I am here; whatever the cares that burden you so, lay them on my shoulders."

"Oh, my brother! It is beautiful, beautiful! You have done your job too well; I was transported back to our old home, only without the familiar faces. Sitting here amongst the scents and sounds of our childhood home, looking out on that frozen garden, I was remembering our father and mother, and our dear grandmother, who is all that remains to us of family. Who knows if she still lives? Oh, I miss it so!"

"Here now, this isn't how you were meant to receive our little masquerade," Sebastien drew another chair up next to his sister and sat down. He was utterly at ease with all of her moods, be they tears or tempest, through long years of proximity and the natural sympathy between twins. "It was supposed to waken happy memories, and anticipation of our return there someday. For you know that we shall go back there to visit, to breathe again that desert air and sit at the feet of our grandmother, who is most assuredly alive; at least she was last month when the merchants

dropped anchor in the harbor at Messaline to take on spice and silk. I inquired at a tavern near the docks, and one of the captains had gossip of her latest squabble with the sultan. Perhaps when spring comes we shall board one of those merchant ships and do some trading of our own. Come, what do you think the going rate is on returning castaways?"

Viola smiled a little, cheered by this news of their grandmother. She let Sebastien dry her face with his handkerchief, and sat quietly with him until she felt that she could face the others. She began speaking about this possible visit, first proposed by Orsino and now repeated by her brother.

"But I cannot go by sea -- surely he must understand that," she said emphatically. "He will send a company of cavalry with me overland, but will not accompany me himself. Those cursed pirates have been raiding again, and he must oversee the campaign. You see, do you not, Sebastien, that I cannot travel for weeks through strange territory with strange men. They are loyal enough, but they are soldiers, and to them I would be just a valuable cargo to be delivered safely. I must have some company, some ally to make the journey bearable. Oh, if only you and Olivia would come!"

"I would like nothing better, but I fear that Olivia would not agree to such a plan. She has never been so far from home, and I fear the rigors of travel would bruise her tender sensibilities beyond endurance. She has not lived the nomadic life that we have lived, but is used to familiar surroundings and people."

Olivia was at that moment dancing with her brother-in-law. Orsino congratulated her on the decorations, the food, the music; just the thing, he said, to brighten a dull winter evening.

"I am afraid Viola does not find it so stimulating. She has not come out of that corner since you arrived. And now Sebastien has gone back there as well. Perhaps your moonlight ride has given her a chill after all. Do you suppose she is unwell?"

"She is well enough in her body," Orsino replied, "but her mind has been uneasy of late. She is not so accustomed as you and I to unfriendly weather, and the enforced confinement to her rooms makes her melancholy. When your invitation arrived, she brightened a little; but like the sun on a gloomy winter day, she has slipped behind a cloud. She misses her homeland and her family, and I fear that your ball, delightful though I find it, has caused her some pangs."

"Why Orsino, if she is so unhappy here, you must let her go home, at least for a while. There are ships leaving every fortnight that stop at Messaline. Why have you not put her on one?"

"I have tried," he protested. "But she is utterly terrified of the sea ever since the shipwreck. I have offered to send her overland with a company of my cavalry as escort, but she refuses to travel without me. I cannot go - there are important matters which I must attend to here. So what is to be done?"

They waltzed in silence then, and when the music stopped, Olivia led him to Viola's hiding place.

"I have a solution to this dilemma," she announced. "Viola must go home, and Orsino must stay. Viola must have an escort, not just a pack of soldiers, and I have this husband hanging about the place, causing mischief. So I propose an exchange; Viola and I will each give up our husbands for a short while, and each shall gain a brother in his stead. Sebastien will accompany his sister to their homeland, and Orsino shall keep me from perishing of boredom this winter. What say you?"

"Oh, Olivia!" Viola exclaimed, kissing her sister-in-law impulsively.

"A fine idea," Orsino declared. Then, raising an eyebrow at Sebastien, "But what do you say, Sebastien? Leaving your wife and the comforts of home for a long journey in winter? It may be difficult, you know."

Sebastien stood before his wife, took her hands in his, and looked into her eyes. "Is this truly your desire? I would not of my own accord leave you here alone, eager though I am to help my sister and see my childhood home again."

"Come, my lord, I prithee," she whispered, "woulds't thou be ruled by me?"

"Madam, I will."

So it was decided. Supper was announced, and Lord Mortimer, of all people, found the bean in his cake. Sebastien bestowed the crown and sceptre with great pomp, and Lord Mortimer became, for that evening at least, the Lord of Misrule.

Viola rode into San D'Oro late one spring afternoon, exhausted and annoyed. They had exchanged their elegant cavalry mounts for mountain ponies on the far side of the Apennine range. The sturdy little beasts had carried them easily through the high passes, but the soldiers had complained unceasingly about the blow to their dignity. Viola had suggested to their captain that perhaps they would be more comfortable if they packed away their sabres and tall boots and dressed like the guides. The captain declared that this would wreck his military discipline, and so the dashing cavalry officers continued to crouch atop their ponies; stirrups shortened to keep their feet off the ground, knees in their chins, and sabres scraping against the rocky trail. The soldiers also complained about the food, insulted the guides and got thrown out of taverns in every village they passed through. On several occasions, it was only Sebastien's diplomacy and Viola's supply of ready cash that kept them from being thrown into the local baron's dungeon. By the time they reached the outskirts of Messaline's capital city, Viola was out of patience and nearly out of money.

She got them rooms at an inn just inside the walls of the old city so that they could rest a little and clean up before presenting themselves to her grandmother. To save further argument with the captain, Viola hired a carriage for herself, Sebastien, and the three officers. A wagon would serve to carry the soldiers. The ponies were to be fed, rested, then returned with the guides to their village. A huge meal and a dozen bottles of wine did much to restore the good humor of the company, and evening found them climbing the road that wound to the hilltop villa where the twins' grandmother lived in the style of the royal court of years gone by. The gates stood open in welcome, the gatekeeper stiffly at attention as they rolled past. Boys with torches ran alongside the carriage to light the way to the house. Viola breathed deeply of the scent of flowers that was carried through the carriage's open windows.

Old Pietre the steward stood waiting for them at the front door. He bowed deeply as Sebastien handed his sister down from the carriage.

"Welcome home, my lord and lady. The Contessa is waiting for you in her sitting room. Sirs, your men may follow Vincente to the barracks; I will show you to your rooms."

Brother and sister held hands as they ascended the grand staircase. Ancestors beamed and glowered at them by turns as they passed beneath the portraits that lined the walls. Before the gilded doors of their grandmother's sitting room, Viola gave Sebastien's hand a squeeze; he winked at her and straightened his back. She smoothed her hair and took a deep breath.

“Children! Here you are at last. I have been waiting so long to see you. Come in, come in.”

Everything was just as it had always been. The delicate little tables, the thickly-cushioned sofas, the tall narrow windows open to the soft night breeze. Just as always, too, the tiny white-haired woman around which the entire room focused. The Contessa di Vassare put down her book and adjusted the drape of her gold brocaded satin robe. Gems flashed on her slender fingers and at her throat as she stretched her hands out to her grandchildren. Viola and Sebastien each took a fragile hand, then each kissed a dry white cheek and sat at her feet on the plump velvet ottoman.

“Now children, tell me everything.”

And so they did. Starting with the sea voyage that was to have taken them back to Messaline two years ago, and the shipwreck, and all the fantastic events that followed. They talked the night through, until their voices failed and the wakening songbirds took up the tale. The Contessa summoned the dozing footmen from their shadowy corners to take the exhausted travelers to their beds.

“Now go to sleep, my dears, and when you wake up, roll over and go back to sleep some more. You needn’t worry about your soldiers any more – Pietre will look after them. You are home now, and all of your cares have been left at the doorstep. We will talk more after you’ve had a proper rest, and I may have some things to tell you. Go now, and sleep well.”

The twins rose with some difficulty and stumbled after the servants. When they were gone, the Contessa summoned her steward and gave orders for the care and feeding of Orsino’s men.

“Oh, and be sure to invite the officers to dine with me this evening. Their feelings must be looked to, and I fear that they have been somewhat bruised recently. There will be news from Orsino’s court before long, I feel, and we shall need the loyalty of these men.”

Viola had been gone for a week when Orsino was overtaken by a nameless melancholy. At first he had reveled in his freedom; he took his meals in the officer's mess instead of in his private dining salon, he lounged in the sitting room in muddy hunting boots, he flirted with the chambermaids. But his delight in these liberties was short-lived. There was no Viola to reproach him with a look, to sigh deeply, to observe every breach. His officers had their own alliances and routines, in which he appeared but could not participate. The charwomen cleaned the dried mud from the rugs without comment. Even the chambermaids did not take him seriously; they knew that any indiscretion would find its way eventually to Viola's ears, and every advance was firmly rebuffed.

One cold afternoon, Orsino went out hunting alone. When darkness fell he was miles from home, and took shelter in an abandoned woodcutter's hut. He was comfortable enough, with his hounds and his fur cloak to keep him warm and a freshly killed hare roasting on the tiny hearth, but he was unused to being so utterly alone. In the frosty silence of the forest, he realized that he had not spoken to a soul all day, and that it did not feel much different from any other day of late. Although he was surrounded by people all day, and he spoke to them, and they to him, nothing of substance was communicated. He conveyed more by resting his hand on the back of his wife's neck than by an entire evening in the company of his steward.

Orsino returned home the next morning, and as he handed his horse over to a young cadet, he remarked, "The wolves are not so numerous in the forest this year. I heard barely a dozen howling last night when I slept there."

Instead of exclaiming over Orsino's bravery in such a perilous place, the youth replied, "Aye, sir, they do say your men have killed a great many of the beasts. At any rate, the mare seems none the worse for a night out."

Orsino strode into the hall, calling for hot wine and meat, gaining some satisfaction from the stir that he managed to create among the household staff. When the captain of the house guard asked if he had had a good run, Orsino brusquely replied that he had merely tired of all this useless chatter, and had been seeking a little peace and quiet. He went on to say that the forest was bare of game this year, and that someone had better rein in the junior officers, or there would not even be enough rabbits to make a pair of gloves, never mind a stag or a boar to hunt. The captain, familiar with his master's moods, agreed sadly that it had been a poor season for game.

When Orsino had finished the roast goose and pudding, and was sipping a final cup of mulled wine, he called for his secretary.

"I want to go away for a while. Write to my brother, Lord Nicholas, and tell him I will be visiting him for a fortnight."

The secretary peered down his long nose at his appointment book. "Alas, my lordship, your brother is campaigning against the Moors this winter, and your sister-in-law has taken the children and retired to her parents' chalet in Switzerland."

"What, Nicholas off fighting in Spain? That rogue always manages to find a warm berth for the winter. Well, I hope he gets the flux. What about my cousin Eleanor, who married that merchant fellow? I understand they have a large estate near the city - they will surely welcome a lonely kinsman."

"Ah, the lady Eleanor," sighed the secretary. "Her last letter to you disclosed that a terrible fire destroyed their house."

"What? Were they hurt? Why do you never tell me these things, Godolfo? I should be told the events of my own family."

"I beg your lordship's pardon, but the letter came while you were closeted with your admirals before the last assault against the pirates. The lady Viola sent condolences and a letter of introduction to your lordship's architect."

"I see. And what of my mother? Has the Dowager Duchess fled the country or been swept away by flood?"

"No indeed, your lordship's mother is quite well and is, I believe, currently in residence in her town house. But if you will excuse my mention of it, my lord," the secretary kept his eyes discreetly on his book, "after your last visit, when you argued so violently with your sister Magdalene, she asked that you not return for at least a year. That was, ahem, five months ago."

Orsino stared glumly into the bottom of his empty cup. "Very well. It seems I am fated to remain here alone until my wife deigns to return to me. Perhaps I will go to the winter lodge instead. There are not so many wolves this year, and we can no doubt find enough game to keep from starving. I shall finish that treatise on military strategy that I have been writing. If I am to be alone, then I shall remove myself to a truly lonely spot. Godolfo, notify the captain of my plans at once. I want no one to accompany me, save you and he and one of the huntsmen. Have you a bearskin cloak?"



The secretary could only stammer, horrified at the notion of exchanging his comfortable suite for a pine-bough cot covered with reeking bearskin, of giving up croissants and coffee for scorched meat and rum. Orsino had risen from the table and was about to leave the room when the secretary finally found his voice.

"A moment, your lordship! I neglected to mention it, but a note came just yesterday from the lady Olivia. She inquired after your lordship's health and asked if you had any news yet of your wife and her husband. She is somewhat alarmed by rumors of bandits on the roads."

"Olivia?" Orsino paused at the door. "You say my sister-in-law is distressed? But there is no great danger, with my men escorting them. Perhaps I should call on her, to ease her mind. It must be difficult for her there alone, without her husband's guidance. Send a letter, Godolfo; tell her that I shall call on her next week, to lend her my fraternal advice and support in her husband's absence." As Orsino's footsteps receded, Godolfo sighed in relief. The chambermaid who was gathering up the remains of Orsino's supper winked at him.

"That were a close call, eh, sir? Let's just hope that the lady doesn't tire of his company before the snow melts."

Godolfo glared at her and closed his book with a snap. "Impertinent girl! You just look to the dishes, and I shall deal with her ladyship."

Indeed, the letter he wrote was a model of courtly concern, with little of the condescension of Orsino's original thought. Olivia, on receiving it, was charmed. She was bored; she had no houseguests, the snow was too deep to go out visiting in the carriage, and she missed Sebastien. Her note to Orsino had been more a device to elicit a visit than an expression of true concern, for she shared the opinion of most people who knew Sebastien, that his innate luck and good nature would always carry him through any difficulty. Now that the device had proved successful, she began preparing for the visit with the enthusiasm that was usually reserved for a grand social event. She planned meals, ordered dresses, and instructed musicians; Olivia was determined to keep her brother-in-law by her side until she tired of him.

Olivia's house and staff were better designed to entertain and amuse than Orsino's castle, which had been built as a military outpost and as such was better suited to keep people out than to invite them in. When Orsino and his escort cantered up the drive late on the appointed afternoon, they were met by liveried grooms who removed their horses and footmen who took their cloaks. The men were shown into the salon, whose oak-paneled walls gleamed in

reflected firelight, and whose deep chairs and divans invited dozing and lounging. Olivia greeted them with hot cider and cake, handed around by the most attractive of her ladies.

"I have a surprise, dear brother," Olivia said to Orsino, drawing him aside. "I am giving a dinner this evening in your honor. Just a few of the local families, nothing elaborate. I hope you do not mind entertaining us."

Orsino, starved for society, was delighted. "A wonderful idea. But I have only my riding clothes to wear. I would not embarrass your guests by dining with them in the guise of a common soldier."

"Oh, not to worry. Your man Godolfo is in on the secret, and he has sent your evening clothes ahead this morning. Now, was that not clever of me? Please say you will do me the honor of dining here tonight, my dear brother."

Orsino agreed readily, and so began a period of friendship between the two aristocrats who had been neighbors for many years but had never known each other well. The dinner was followed by a dance, then by dances at other houses. When the snow melted and the spring hunt season was approaching, Olivia called her old riding master out of retirement. She had not been on horseback, except for a few picnics, since her father's death several years earlier. At first she was awkward, and the lessons trying. Olivia spent hours afterwards sitting on cushions, while her riding master had to nurse his aching throat with ale after shouting at her all afternoon. Soon, though, she regained the skill of her youth, when she had been a fearless rider and the darling of the local hunt.

She purchased a new saddle horse, too, a blooded bay mare whose rich dark color matched her mistress' hair. One morning, as Orsino rode up the drive chatting with his escort, she burst out of the trees and pulled her horse up short before them, the mare snorting and dancing in place. "Come Orsino," she shouted. "Let's see if that fat gelding of yours can go any faster than a jog! Race me to the house!"

She was off in a swirl of sky-blue riding skirt. Orsino's men sat gaping, but the duke spurred his own horse, who leapt after the mare in a flash. They arrived at the front door neck and neck, Olivia's hair streaming out behind her. The riding master, watching from the stable door, shook his head at the impropriety, but the ladies watching from behind the curtained windows sighed with envy.

"Well done, lady!" Orsino exclaimed. "You ride almost as well as Viola. That mare is a prize, as well. Will you sell her to me?"

"Not for all the gold in your treasury," Olivia replied, stung at the comparison to Viola. "But I will race you again, and the winner may keep the loser's horse. What say you?"

"Ah now, that's not fair, Olivia. My Rupert is willing enough, but he would be carrying a good ten stone more in weight, for you cannot weigh more than my saddle. Nay, I fear I shall have to be content to watch your mare go through her paces."

They spent the rest of that day riding through Olivia's parklands, and both enjoyed it so much that they agreed to a new regimen. Gloomy days were spent at Olivia's fireside, gossiping about mutual acquaintances; and on fine days they rode out together, racing up and down the muddy roads, or following the huntsman through the leafless woods as he trained the yearling puppies. This closeness did not go unnoticed in either household. One person in particular kept a careful eye on Orsino's absence from home, questioning his escort about his activities when they managed to return for a day or two.

Before Viola and Sebastien had been a week with their grandmother, Antonio arrived in the port of San D'Oro at the helm of an Illyrian sloop. He brought letters and gifts for Viola from her husband and a fat packet tied in ribbon for Sebastien. Sebastien welcomed his friend with enthusiasm, more than compensating for Viola's somewhat cool reception. She had always felt Antonio to be a troublesome sort, conflict following in his wake like the dark corsairs whom he was alleged to have sailed with before he met the twins.

Sebastien and Antonio went out riding into the countryside, one day not long after his arrival. Sebastien wanted to repay his friend's generosity and show off the beauty of his native land. When they had gotten several miles past the gates of the city, into the hot white-baked hills beyond the coast, Antonio pulled his horse to a walk. Sebastien looked around, puzzled.

"There's not much to see here, old friend; just thornbush and rocks. If you're tired, I know a tavern, just over these hills."

"I'm not tired. Listen to me, Sebastien; I wanted to talk to you alone, outside the walls of your grandmother's house, and far from the ears of Orsino's men."

"Why Antonio," said Sebastien with a grin, "do you forget that you yourself are Orsino's man? That is certainly his banner that flies from the mast of the ship you sail, and I believe it is his gold that fattens your purse every month." Their horses walked side by side, eyes half closed in the blazing sun. Antonio spat into the dust.

"That is what I think of Orsino and his gold! I accepted this commission so that I could see you again, dear Sebastien, and Orsino offered it only because of the friendship between you and I. He is a fool, for he should know that I would tell you of events in Illyria. Orsino has dishonored you and your sister; he is a scoundrel, a dog. I must tell you this, my friend, though I know it will cause you pain. Please understand that I do this out of love."

Antonio peered anxiously into his friend's face, scanning it for signs of distress already, before he had even imparted his news. Sebastien scanned the horizon, gauging the distance to the tavern. He spared Antonio a glance, still faintly puzzled. "Pray don't pain yourself on my account, Antonio. Come, race me to yonder tavern, and I'll introduce you to the best wine in Messaline." So saying, Sebastien dug in his spurs. His half-doing mount woke with a start and leapt forward. Antonio gritted his teeth and followed, determined to tell his news whether his friend would listen or no.

"Sebastien, you must listen to me," Antonio whispered urgently to his friend over their third pint. "Orsino is behaving like a rogue, and it is my duty as your friend to tell you what is happening. He is with the lady Olivia every day, and they are often alone together in her private sitting room. They race about the grounds on horseback, and she lets her hair down before him. All the household is talking about them, and most of the barracks, as well. I could not bear to watch your good name and your wife's reputation being so ruined, and so I have brought the news to you here in your native land. Perhaps your grandmother can raise an army for you, and you can avenge your honor against Orsino in battle."

Sebastien was a little drunk, and more inclined to be melancholy than angry.

"But I thought that she loved me," he protested. "She practically begged me to marry her, and she has always seemed content with our situation. Besides, Orsino pursued her before I ever saw her, and she would have none of him. Has she changed so?"

"You must remember," Antonio replied, "that they grew up together. Orsino is a great deal like Olivia's brother that died, and it was only after this brother's death that she refused to see Orsino. Most thought it only a temporary whim, and that they would marry when she came out of mourning. Then you and your lovely sister, who is so like to you, washed onto our shores, and everything changed. But some bonds are not easily broken, and when Orsino grew lonely, it was easy to fall back into old habits."

"The shameless cur," growled Sebastien, more concerned for his sister's honor than his own. "Were his feelings for my sister so shallow?"

"Ah no," soothed Antonio. "He loves her well enough. But a man like Orsino has a short memory and an impressionable nature; and as you know, the lady Olivia makes quite an impression."

"I must tell Viola," Sebastien said.

But when the contessa gave a dinner party some days later for Orsino's men, including Antonio and his officers, Sebastien still had not broken Antonio's news to his sister. He swore his friend to silence on the matter, saying that he must consider how best to tell her. They were to attend the party and drink to Orsino's health as though nothing were amiss. The contessa had invited several young ladies from the city, which made it quite a lively occasion. Viola's escort made the most of their long journey, exaggerating the difficulties and minimizing their own ill-temper in facing them. The young ladies were suitably impressed; the lieutenant was about to make a conquest of the mayor's lovely eldest daughter. Only Antonio refused to be entertained or entertaining; he sulked in his seat and replied in

monosyllables to the young wife of the ambassador from Ceylon. She finally gave up on him and concentrated on her other neighbor, noting with an inward sniff the way Antonio's eyes remained fixed on the handsome young grandson of their hostess.

Antonio did not notice the removal of the young woman's attention; he was completely absorbed in observing Sebastien. Sebastien flirted tirelessly with the woman seated next to him, and traded frequent glances with his sister across the table. If Antonio ever tired of watching his friend he had only to look at Viola to see that beloved face again, softened in a feminine frame and exhibiting, even Antonio must admit, a quicker intelligence around the eyes and mouth. Watching the two of them, and imagining their respective spouses back in Illyria, Antonio grew agitated. Something must be done. Sebastien was too kind-hearted and easy natured to take action, no matter how monstrous the offence. And it was monstrous that he was being cuckolded by his own brother-in-law. Orsino! Antonio seethed, thinking how the duke had managed to insult two people with one act. He was utterly arrogant, assured of immunity from any consequences of his betrayal. He no doubt imagined that he could amuse himself however he liked, and that his wife would come hurrying home to him after her visit, none the wiser.

But suppose she did not come home?

After the success of the dinner, the Contessa decided to give a ball. Viola had been enthusiastic about the extravagance of Olivia's costume ball, and the Contessa was determined not to be outdone. Besides, there were several promising matches developing, and she wanted to encourage them; there were so few eligible young men in town this year. While Viola and her grandmother conferred with the dressmaker, Antonio took Sebastien aside.

"I must excuse myself for several days. I have some commissions from Orsino which will take me down the coast for several days. On my return, I shall send the ship back to him in the care of the first mate, and I will be at your service. If you go to war, I shall fight at your side; if you demand satisfaction for your honor in personal combat, I shall act as your second. In short, my dear friend, I shall not again let you venture unaccompanied into Orsino's clutches."

"You are the best friend I could ask for," replied Sebastien, touched and a little embarrassed at his companion's outpouring. "And far better than I deserve. I will speak to Viola soon, and when we are resolved on some course of action, you will be the first to know."

But the day of the ball came, and still Sebastien had not mentioned Antonio's accusations to Viola. It was not that he doubted his friend, he told himself, but one did not like to cause such havoc in one's own family on the word of a single man, one who was admittedly a bit single-minded when it came to the Duke. And yet, he admitted, Viola should be warned that such gossip was being passed about, so that she would be prepared to answer it. He weighed the matter all day, considering opening remarks while he was being shaved, imagining her reaction as he dressed, rejecting the plan completely while he escorted his grandmother to the ballroom. The evening passed in a whirl of flashing costumes, perfumed shoulders and whispered invitations.

It was late, guests were beginning to drift out into the hall to say their farewells, and Sebastien had drunk enough wine to finally make a decision. He approached Viola, who was dressed as a gypsy queen in a headdress of gold coins and a gown emblazoned with tin stars and gilt suns, and bowed before her.

"Your majesty, a word?"

"You have come too late, my drunken courtier. I promised the next dance to this imposing gentleman. Perhaps I shall grant you an audience after this waltz."

Sebastien looked up to see his sister's elbow engulfed in the black-gloved paw of an enormous pirate. The man had a great scimitar stuck through his sash, and a gold ring glinted in his ear. That's going a bit far for a costume

ball, Sebastien thought. He bowed again as she twirled on one gold-slippered toe and glided off with the buccaneer. Perhaps another glass of wine while I wait, he thought, and began searching for a footman.

Viola's attention was entirely taken with trying to stay out from under her partner's boots. He must be one of Antonio's men, she thought, more accustomed to a pitching deck beneath his feet than a dance floor. He was very strong, and seemed to toss her about as easily as lifting a tankard of rum. She noticed that his face was very red, and the bandana wrapped around his head was dark with sweat.

"You must be very warm in that costume," she said helpfully. "All that black leather. Would you like to stop and rest a bit? I don't mind at all."

"No, thank you, dear lady," he growled in reply. "But perhaps we could dance out onto the terrace, where it is cooler. There are an uncommon lot of people in this room."

He waltzed her out through the open doors into the cool dimness of the terrace. They could still hear the music, though his feet still seemed to move independently of any tempo. Viola closed her eyes and took a deep breath of the evening air. She had not realized how close it had been in the ballroom. She heard her partner sigh hugely, and smiled in sympathy. Finally the music stopped, the dance was over. She opened her eyes and stepped back from the pirate. They bowed to one another, and he thanked her for the honor.

"You must be anxious to return to your ship," she said to him. "To count your booty and plan your next attack. I understand that pirates prefer to strike at night."

He grinned, a gold tooth flashing out from his dark beard. "As a matter of fact, that is true, my lady Duchess. Would you like to see my ship? She's a sweet little galleon just out there on the bay. Look, you can see her from the railing there."

Viola allowed him to lead her to the edge of the terrace, where she could indeed see the moonlight rippling on the surface of the bay. The ships at anchor there were like so many sleeping seabirds, riding the waves through the calm night. Her companion had a firm grip on her arm, so she leaned out a little to see better.

"But I thought that style of ship was called a sloop," she said, searching for the shape of the Illyrian vessel. He did not reply. Instead, he let go of her arm, and Viola felt herself toppling forward over the low railing. Her scream was cut short as many hands caught at her arms and legs, and one was clamped firmly over her mouth. A rough cloth was thrown over her and she was wrapped and tied like a hen bound for market, then tossed over someone's shoulder



and off they went at a jarring trot. Viola found it hard to breathe through the dusty sacking and the jouncing about was very painful; she was determined not to faint, but in the end she was overcome and lost consciousness.

When she awoke, Viola felt the unmistakable sensation of being aboard a ship under sail. Her body was bruised, her head was pounding, and her throat burned from breathing the filth inside the sack; but terror overrode all of these sensations. She was in complete darkness, and didn't know if she had been blinded or if she was merely in a dark room. The motion of the ship brought back vivid memories of her last sea voyage, the one that had ended in shipwreck. In her semi-conscious state, Viola imagined that she was back on that sinking ship. How shall I swim to shore when I cannot see, she wondered. How shall I even find the surface when the waves wash over me? This was intolerable; there must be someone to help her.

"Sebastien!" she screamed, frightening herself further by the sound of her shriek in a small space. "Help me, please, somebody! I am trapped!"

The shouting helped to clear her head and she remembered too late, as footsteps thudded towards her, the events that had precipitated her swoon. A key scraped, the door swung open, and Viola's eyes were dazzled by the dim glow of a lantern. At least I am not blind, she thought gratefully. The lantern revealed the arm and anxious face of a boy, pale and dark-haired.

"Please be still, my lady," he whispered, just loud enough to be heard over the distant shouts to "stop that infernal squalling." "It will do you no good to scream, and much harm, if the captain is irritated enough to visit you himself. He gave his word not to harm you, but his word is weaker than his temper when he's been drinking."

"Who is your captain? I demand to know! And to whom did he give his word?" Viola demanded, her terror now sunk beneath a tide of anger.

"Please do not raise your voice," the youth begged. "I will tell you what I can, but you must not provoke him further. You are aboard the *Caprice*, and her captain is my master, Don Salazar of Atlantia. I am Carlos Dos Rijos, at your service. I do not know with what black traitor he devised this scheme, but he knew that you would be attending a costume ball tonight. That is all I know, I swear. Now tell me, lady, are you hurt? I have been charged with your care while we are at sea, and I will gladly do whatever is in my small power to ease the journey for you." He spoke like a gentleman, though he wore rough garments of a sailor, and could not have been older than sixteen years.

"Some warm, dry clothes, if any are to be had," Viola said, "and a cup of wine to ease my aching head."

"Very well, my lady. I will leave you with the lamp, which may give you some comfort."

He hung the lamp on a peg and left, bolting the door behind him. Viola looked about in the dim light, and saw that she was in a tiny cabin whose only furnishings were a narrow bed bolted to one wall and a washstand with an empty pitcher. She had been lying on the floor when she woke; either her captors had left her there or she had rolled off the bed from the motion of the ship. Viola took the rough blanket from the bunk and wrapped it around her shoulders. Her headdress was gone, and only a few tin stars still clung to her gown, which had a ragged hole in one sleeve. For Viola, the party was most assuredly over.

\* \* \*

Sebastien waited for Viola's return until none but the servants remained in the ballroom. Thinking that he must have missed her in the crowd, he finally went to bed. His sleep was interrupted, in the black hour before dawn, by a discreet yet persistent tapping at his door. He opened the door to find Pietre standing in the small circle of light cast by the single candle that he held. The steward held out a letter, folded and sealed with dark drop of wax that looked, in the shadows of the hall, like freshly spilled blood.

"Forgive me for waking you, my lord. A messenger brought this just now, and insisted that it be given immediately to 'the family of the lady Viola, formerly of Illyria.' The rogue ran off before my men could detain him. I fear it may be grim news, and so make bold to bring it now."

Sebastien took the letter and broke the seal. A lock of pale hair and a ragged swatch of dark satin lay folded within. He gathered them in one trembling hand and read the elegantly flowing script.

"The lady Viola, wife of the tyrant Orsino, is now the prisoner of the free people of Atlantia. If he would see her again, or if her family holds her dear, we must be repaid for the losses our merchants have suffered at the hands of Orsino's raiders. When twenty stone of gold ingots have been received by our agents, the lady shall be returned. You have the word of Joachim Domingo y Cordoba Salazar that she shall suffer no harm."

"Salazar! That filthy pirate – so it was he who danced with my sister at the ball. The nerve of the man, to come amongst us so boldly! Come Pietre, we shall awaken my grandmother. I must away after them before the trail is cold."

The contessa took the news very hard. When she had read the note, she clutched desperately at Sebastien.

"Dear God, the poor child! We must save her, Sebastien! I pray that it may not be too late!"

"I leave at once," Sebastien declared. "I will track the coward to his den and see him hanged for this atrocity. To abduct a woman from her home, and hold her ransom for her husband's acts, is a knavish act indeed. But

— be comforted, grandmother; Viola has weathered difficult storms before, and has proved her mettle beyond all expectation. She will hold fast until help comes."

"Yes, your sister is a woman of rare spirit. It is not for her that I am afraid, but for the child she carries."

Orsino and Olivia were taking a turn around the garden. A weak sun struggled to warm the sodden grass and the bare black twigs that would soon be bursting with life. Olivia glanced toward the main gate, just visible through the park.

"Your men are very hard on their horses, brother. Look you at this fellow coming up the drive now. He probably bears no more urgent message than that one of your ships has arrived in the harbor, yet he spurs his beast until it is lathered from bit to crupper. Do you drive your men as mercilessly as they drive their horses, to teach them such behavior?"

"Indeed not, countess; I am far too easy on my men. But it is difficult to teach a young soldier the value of prudence and a slow pace. They will always prefer to attack than to stand fast, and they will go everywhere at full gallop. See there, he even stops quickly!"

As if to illustrate Orsino's point, the young cadet pulled up hard on his steaming mount, then jumped to the ground before the animal had slid to a full stop. He shouted at a nearby groom, who pointed towards the garden. The cadet vaulted the low hedge and pounded up the slope to his master. He stopped before the amazed gentlefolk, gasping for air.

"Your pardon, my lord," he panted. "The Falcon has just made port, and her captain bade me bring you this message in all haste. It concerns my lady the Duchess."

Orsino took the proffered note, read it quickly, then crumpled it in one fist. He turned to Olivia and sketched a bow.

"I shall have to beg you to excuse me, Countess. I have received word that my wife has been taken from her grandmother's home by the godless pirates of Atlantia. This letter is from Sebastien, who has gone in pursuit; but it has been a week in passage. I go now to muster my troops, we shall be on the open sea by the morrow."

"Viola, taken? But why? And how has Sebastien pursued them? He is no sea captain, versed in the lore of ships and battle. What folly, to throw himself upon the mercy of the waves! Ah, what shall I do?" Olivia covered her face with her hands and stood trembling before him. Orsino was wild to get away, but he could not leave her thus, sobbing on the path. He put one hand on her shoulder and the other beneath her elbow, and guided her up the path to the gate, where a maidservant was waiting with a shawl.

“Take your mistress inside,” he instructed. “She has had a great shock and must be looked after.” To Olivia he said, “Your husband has done what his duty requires, madame, as her brother and her protector. He has taken my sloop, the Phoenix, captained by that Antonio who loves him so well. Be comforted, for that rogue is well versed in those skills that your husband lacks. All that you may do is to keep yourself well, and to pray for our victory and safe return. I shall send you word as soon as I am able.”

With Olivia safely in the hands of others, Orsino ran for the stable, shouting for his horse. He threw himself into the saddle and thundered down the drive, his cloak snapping in the wind. The young soldier followed at a slower pace.

Olivia allowed herself to be led into the house, where she collapsed onto a chaise. When she recovered from her swoon, the countess called for her secretary and ordered all parties and dinners to be cancelled, all invitations refused. She sent for her priest, and when that good old gentleman came hurrying from his meditations, she retreated with him behind the doors of her private sitting room. From time to time, wild sobbing and mournful shrieks were audible to those waiting in the hall. He emerged several hours later, shaking his head sadly and muttering, “Poor child. If she loses him, it may be more than she can bear.” The priest sent for the surgeon, who sat at her side and patted her hand while she told him the news. He ordered laudanum and strict bed rest, no excitement or stimulation of any kind.

The maids fetched the somber black and purple dresses from the attics where they had been stored since the wedding, and heavy black drapes were hung in Olivia’s rooms. She lay about in her black silk gowns, face like a pale moon in the dimness, and received well-wishers with whispered thanks and weak gestures. The only activity she engaged in with any enthusiasm was the perusal of Orsino’s regular dispatches from the high seas.

Viola sat at a window, sewing. The golden light of late afternoon cast long shadows on the unvarnished plank floor and up the whitewashed walls. This small, austere room was a world away from her sumptuous chamber in Orsino's castle. The sound and smell of the sea permeated the air here as well, but it seemed much friendlier in the balmy climate of Atlantia. Viola herself struck the only note of luxury. Her hair, held back from her face with a simple black ribbon, tumbled down her back in waves of opulent gold. The gown she wore was made of plain white woolen cloth, but cut and sewn at her instruction, it draped about her like an empress' gown of state. There was much more of her to drape now; the roundness which she had been able to hide all the long way from Illyria to Messaline, and for much of her stay in San D'Oro, could no longer be disguised.

As Viola's nimble fingers guided the needle along the edges of the tiny gown, her mind was tumbling about in a much less orderly fashion. She knew her time was near, and was growing fearful despite the reassurances of the midwife who visited her daily. She wished that she had not hidden her condition from Orsino, that she had at least written to him of the news, as her grandmother had urged. But Orsino would have forbidden her journey, and Viola had been consumed with homesickness from the moment she realized that she was carrying a child. And once arrived at her family home, Viola postponed writing to her husband in order to postpone the return to him that her duty would require. Now, perversely, she wanted him with her; even wondered why he had not come yet to rescue her. For it had been many weeks since her arrival in the pirate stronghold.

Viola let her eyes wander over the furnishings of her room, and smiled to think of the outrage that Orsino and her grandmother would share, could they see her now. And yet it was much better now than when she had first arrived. That day she had been carried, weak and ill after many days at sea, to a room in Don Salazar's own house that suited her status, according to the standards of the so-called free people. Hangings of rich velvet kept the room in perpetual dimness, exhaling clouds of dust when stirred. The high bed with its coverlet of waterstained satin was rich lodging for the troops of fleas that drove Viola, sick though she was, from its musty embrace. She found a plain wooden chair wedged into a corner behind a huge cracked mirror; when the pirate chief came swaggering into the room, he found her sitting in it, scratching furiously at her ankles.

"Well, Duchess, how do you like your accommodations?"

"Don Salazar, I presume?" Viola asked.

"The very same. So you see, lady, that not all disguises are false, and a woman in your position should be more careful with whom she dances."

"My position?"

"Your husband has many enemies, *Duchess*. When a man interferes with the peaceful activities of his neighbors, he must expect to suffer their displeasure."

"To my knowledge, sir, my husband has not made a habit of abducting women from their families and -- just what do you intend to do with me?"

"You may ease your mind on that score. This is strictly a business transaction. When the Duke supplies us with an amount of gold, commensurate with your worth, we shall supply him with his wife. Please consider yourself a guest of my house in the meantime. Only do not attempt to leave us; this is an island, all the boats belong to me, and all the people, too. Now, do you find the accommodations satisfactory?"

"I cannot tell you, sir. I am so weak from the voyage that I hardly know where I am. I thought at first that I was meant to sleep here, but that cannot be; even my lord Orsino does not enter my bedroom without knocking. If by chance this is the room in which you mean to keep me, might you remove some of these trappings of wealth? I find that in my present condition I prefer to live simply."

The pirate was thrown off course by this rebuke to his manners.

"What condition is that, my lady? If you mean that you expect to be treated like a prisoner, please be assured that it is my intent to see that you suffer from no poverty of surroundings while you are my guest."

"And yet it is the case that I am your prisoner," declared Viola, skating dangerously close to the edge of defiance. "But I am not alone in my captivity, for I am soon to bear my lord's child. So you see, Don Salazar, you have abducted one helpless woman, but you now have two prisoners."

The puzzlement on Salazar's face was replaced by understanding, followed shortly by dawning horror. He had no desire to be responsible for the safety of a pregnant woman. Childbirth was a dangerous undertaking in the best of situations; if this woman or her child were to die in his custody, Salazar knew that all the seven seas would not be wide enough to separate him from Orsino's wrath. The bargain he had made with the mastermind of this abduction had included no provision for the care of an infant. Gold or no, he must return the Duchess to her home before she gave birth, and then put as much water between them as he could.

“My lady,” he said, “You must believe that I had no knowledge of this. Joachim de Salazar may be an outlaw, but he is no monster. We set sail with the tide for Illyria; my housekeeper will fetch you some fresh garments in which to travel.”

“Fresh clothes would be delightful, sir, I’ll take them and thank you heartily. But I will not set foot on another ship while my heart still beats within my body. I can scarcely walk for seasickness even now, and no food has passed my lips for several days. I must have rest and clean, quiet surroundings, or I shall not answer for the consequences. You have already taken grave risks with my health; do you suppose my husband will thank you for risking it further?” Viola saw no need to tell him that her own mother had safely given birth in a tent in a howling sandstorm, only to die days later after a careless servant had neglected to check her slippers for scorpions.

Don Salazar was not accustomed to receiving threats from a woman, yet he dared not force her back onto his ship. She would no doubt make herself sick from spite, and might die just to be revenged on him. So he acquiesced to her desires, sent some of his men to arrange the room to her taste, and procured the services of the best midwife on the island, the one who attended his own mistress. He himself did not return to that room; he preferred the company of women from his own social level – barmaids and fishermen’s daughters who would never dare to express their own desires.

Viola soon recovered from the effects of the voyage, for she was really in excellent health. Soon enough, however, the inactivity of her existence began to chafe her spirits, and she searched for some outlet. Any attempt at escape was out of the question, for the baby might come at any time; all that she could do was to see her child safely into the world, and then worry about returning home. Salazar had staffed his household with captives from the ships he ransacked, and Viola soon discovered that her chambermaid had been seamstress to a rich merchant’s wife before that merchant’s fateful final voyage to the Canaries. Viola asked for cloth and was shown to a storeroom piled with bolts of pilfered satin and brocade, and woollens of all varieties. Soon, Claudette was relieved of her scrubbing duties and set to dressmaking instead, while Viola labored at a layette.

She knotted and bit off her thread and laid aside the christening gown that she was making. The heat of the sun was making her drowsy. She propped her feet on the little footrest that Claudette had placed nearby and closed her eyes, face turned towards the window. Viola spent much of her time napping these days. She was awakened much later by a cool breeze sighing through the window and by the hunger pangs which signaled teatime. She rang the bell and asked the servant to bring her tea and to fetch Carlos. Salazar had appointed the young man to be her page, as he



was the only person in the household with any knowledge of aristocratic protocol. Carlos brought her any news that he heard, and provided company during the long, dull evenings. He arrived now with her tray and sat with her by the small fireplace while she ate. She had told the story of her own adventures, so now she questioned him about how he had ended up in the service of a rogue like Salazar. He seemed glad of an opportunity to tell her the tale.

“My father is a knight on the island province of Isabelle with a small fortune but great ambitions for his children. He believed that I showed some promise as a soldier, so I was to be sent to the military academy at Duke Orsino’s court. He booked my passage on a galleon that was part of a merchant fleet traveling up the coast, thinking that it would be safer because it was escorted by armed mercenaries. There was some rough weather, and my ship foundered, became separated from the fleet. Like a wolf after a stray sheep, Salazar’s ship appeared out of the storm and attacked us. He took what he liked, then cut the sails and left the ship adrift. He took me along, thinking of ransom, I suppose; but then he decided that it would be amusing to have a knight’s son as his cabin boy. I have been in his service for two years now. I suppose that my family believes I am dead.”

It was a sad story, and Viola reached out towards him in sympathy. But her hand stopped mid-reach, as she was paralyzed by a stabbing pain across her abdomen. She wrapped her arms around her body and groaned as the contraction gripped her. Carlos jumped to his feet, eyes wide with panic.

“Fetch the midwife!” Viola told him, through clenched teeth.

It was a mercifully short labor, though it seemed long enough to Viola. She longed for a familiar face at her side; the midwife was skilled but very businesslike, and though little Claudette did her best, holding Viola’s hand and patting at her brow with a moist rag, but they were still only servants. She sobbed for her grandmother, for Orsino, for Sebastien. They did not come. When the baby was finally placed in her arms, the midwife softened a bit.

“There now, my lady, here’s a fine little boy for you. You see, perfect from head to toe. You have a good look at him, then I’ll take him with me. There’s a wet nurse in the village will take good care of him. All right, little babe, come with me. Mother must rest now.”

\* \* \*

Several days later, Viola summoned Salazar to her room. He arrived in haste, suspecting disaster.

“I am ready to go home now,” she announced. “The baby is doing well, and Carlos tells me that the seas have been calm for some days now. The storm season is surely past, and it is safe now for us to travel.”

“But – but – you cannot summon me like a coachmen and demand to be taken home!” spluttered the furious pirate. “I am Joachim Domingo y Cordoba Salazar, terror of the seas. Do not forget that you are my prisoner, lady; you move and breathe at my whim.”

“Yes, yes; I am well aware that all on this island live in fear of your legendary temper. But do not you forget that I am the Duchess of Illyria. If any harm comes to me or my child, it shall be repaid a hundred times by Orsino’s soldiers. You know very well, Don Salazar, that you will be better off when I am safely returned to my home. As long as I am kept here, there is a chance that something will happen, and it is a sad fact that infants are very susceptible to chills and strange fevers. Now, sir, what will you?”

“Curse the day I brought you aboard my ship!” raged Salazar. “Orsino must be mad to keep such a troublesome woman in his house. He can have you and welcome. I will grant your desire, Duchess, because it pleases me to do so, and because I had rather go into battle in a leaking bathtub than to have you under my roof another day. Summon that pet lapdog of a cabin boy, pack up your child, and be prepared to sail at dusk.”

*Orsino arrives at the pirate fortress, at the same time as Sebastien and Antonio. Confusion reigns. No one knows where Viola is. Orsino takes Antonio prisoner, swears he will hang him this time. Antonio accuses Orsino of infidelity; Orsino is outraged at being accused by this criminal. Sebastien mediates, saves Antonio's life, though he is banished from Illyria forever. A woman with the pirates tells them where Viola has gone.*

Orsino, when he sailed with his fleet, headed not for Messaline, but for the island stronghold of the pirates. He did not know its exact location, but after two days at sea, a swift cutter intercepted the warships. She came alongside Orsino's flagship and her captain climbed aboard. A map was exchanged for a heavy sack of gold. The cutter sailed away, and the fleet changed course. Orsino paced the decks, grim-faced. His officers discussed strategy and tactics, the likely strength of the pirate's force.

"Our strategy is simple," Orsino told them. "Rescue my wife, then crush them."

It was a long journey, made longer by the uncertain weather. Winter was not yet prepared to give up its hold. Orsino refused to stay belowdecks during the storms; he would stand at the bow and watch the great waves bearing down on him. Ofttimes the decks were awash, but always he managed to keep his feet. The crew took courage from him, keeping to their posts even in the worst gales. These storms seemed to purge Orsino for a while of his gloom. But then the sea would calm, the sun would come out, and the duke would resume pacing. They stopped at the tiny isle of St. Georges for fresh water and supplies after three weeks traveling. The crew went ashore, seeking news in the taverns and brothels. They came reeling back aboard after several days of diligent questioning with nothing useful to tell. The pirates had been absent from these waters for over a month. Local opinion had it that they were probably either planning a big raid or still patching up from the last one. The officers made their own inquiries among the merchants and constabulary, which confirmed that crime had been remarkably absent recently. One wine merchant did recall an unusual visitor, however. A sloop flying the Illyrian flag had docked at St. Georges the previous week. They had been asking about the pirates, too. The captain had been a somewhat surly fellow, inclined to snap at anyone who inquired too closely about his business; but his companion was nearly his opposite, a bright and friendly young man with a generous purse and a ready wit. He had been the toast of the town for the few days that he had remained. But as soon as the sloop was provisioned, they weighed anchor and sailed south.

“That’s Sebastien, without a doubt,” Orsino remarked when he heard the story. “And that surly captain was Antonio, I’ll wager. They seem to be heading in the same direction as we. That’s curious.” But he did not seem surprised.

Orsino’s fleet sailed soon after this, much to the relief of the locals. Nothing depresses free trade like a fleet of warships in the harbor. They were not far from Atlantia, and made their way carefully, taking readings often from the sun and consulting their dearly purchased map. Orsino ordered the cannons readied and had the soldiers brought up from gambling in the holds to spar with each other on deck. They sighted the island of Atlantia just where the informant had told them it would be, an velvet emerald set in the warm southern sea. They rounded the north cape with cannon primed and swords drawn, but the harbor was empty. Empty, save for a familiar sloop flying Orsino’s colors. The *Sea Witch* rode boldly at anchor at Salazar’s very doorstep, but all was quiet.

Orsino ordered his ship brought alongside. Sebastien and Antonio stood side by side on the foredeck to greet him. Orsino signaled that he was coming aboard, and was pulled onto the ship by his brother-in-law.

“Orsino!” Sebastien embraced him. “Here you are at last, just as I knew you would. We have come by different routes, but with the same purpose. Alas, this place seems to be deserted.”

“Seems to be? Have you searched it? Questioned the people?”

“Yes, yes, of course. Antonio is much more clever about these things than I, and he has seen to it. It seems that this is truly the pirates’ lair. That house on top of the bluff is Salazar’s own residence. But they have gone! Antonio and his men have been all through the town, and none remain, he assures me, save women and children and a few old men. No one knows where the villains have gone.”

“Antonio searched, did he?” Orsino eyed his old enemy suspiciously. “Tell me, Antonio, what news did you find?”

“No news, my lord,” Antonio seemed to choke on the words. “The place is empty, as Sebastien said. Perhaps they have gone raiding. We cannot be sure that they ever had the lady Viola. The letter was, perhaps, a ruse.”

“Perhaps. I am curious, Antonio; how did you find your way to this lonely island? It’s location is a secret very closely held indeed.”

“Ah well, it is not so hard to find if you have experience at sea in this part of the world,” Antonio replied dismissively. But Orsino would not let it go.

“My captains too have a great deal of experience in these seas, yet it cost me a weighty purse of gold to find this island. Can it be Antonio, that you are navigating by memory?”

“What are you suggesting, Orsino?” Antonio’s hand strayed near the hilt of his sword.

“I do not merely suggest, I will shout it to the four winds. I believe that you had a hand in this evil business, and by God, I’ll see you hang for it this time.”

Orsino’s breath came hard, and his hands were balled into fists at his sides. The crew did not know what to do. Antonio was their captain, but Orsino was their ruler. Sebastien stepped between the two men.

“Hold! I will not stand here and watch a battle between my brother and my friend while my sister languishes in some bandit’s prison. Antonio, you need only deny these accusations; and Orsino, you must provide some proof of these slanders, else tender your apologies.”

“I cannot yet prove suspicions,” admitted Orsino. “But let us go ashore. I wager there is someone in this town who will confirm what I say. Antonio says he found no one, but let us see what a company of infantry can uncover.”

Antonio stepped back a little, his eyes shifting from side to side. “There is no need to search again. My crew and I have made a thorough job of it. But if you would rather go sightseeing on this island than continue the search for the duchess, that is your affair.”

“Antonio, my dear friend, do not provoke the duke. You must understand that he is suffering great anguish over my sister’s fate. We cannot deny him a chance to look for himself to see if she is, or was, here.” Sebastien spoke reasonably, but he was worried about his friend’s evasiveness. For the first time, he allowed himself to consider the possibility that Antonio might be involved in Viola’s abduction.

The longboats were lowered, and Orsino went ashore with twenty men. Sebastien accompanied him, but Antonio followed in a separate boat with his own men. The town certainly appeared deserted; although it was a warm day, all of the doors and windows were shut tight. Orsino’s men walked up the main street, pounding on doors and shouting down alleyways. The further they proceeded with no results, the more confident Antonio. He even pounded on a few doors himself. Orsino conferred briefly with the sergeant in charge, who then led the soldiers up the hill towards the house which was reputed to belong to Salazar himself. It too was closed up and quiet.

Orsino ordered the men to surround the house and search for any sign of activity. Finally, in a small house set some distance from the main residence, they found an old woman knitting on her porch. She must have been a little

deaf, for when she heard the thud of the soldier's boots on her floorboards, she threw her needles at them and fled shrieking into her house. But the flimsy door was no match for their sturdy boots, and soon the woman was led trembling before the duke.

"What do you know of the owner of this house?" demanded Orsino. "Where have all the men gone?"

"Oh, well, you know men," cackled the old woman. "They're always going off somewhere – fighting, raiding. Who knows? They certainly don't tell old Sophie when they go."

"But who owns this house, who rules this island?"

"Don Salazar rules here, as well you know, sir." She gave him a sharp look. "And very clever of you, too, to come while he's away. It's easy to terrorize old women when the men with their swords and warships are gone away, ain't it?."

"Very well. And what of this man? Do you know him?" Orsino gripped Antonio by the arm and pulled him forward. The old woman glanced quickly at him.

"He don't look like anyone I seen around here. No, I don't know him."

Orsino released Antonio, who made a great show of straightening out his sleeve, then resumed his questioning. "And had he a woman here with him? A noble woman?"

"Bless you, sir! There's always women here. Women to cook, women to clean, and pretty ones for other purposes. How am I to know who's noble? Once they're in this house, it's all the same, they're just the master's women."

Orsino was beginning to lose his grip on civility. He ground his teeth, and the men were careful not to look at him. The thought of Viola in this house, one of its master's "women," was almost more than he could bear. As he drew breath to try again, Sebastien stepped forward.

"Look at me, good woman," he said softly. "Have you seen a woman who is like to me?"

She looked at him, and paled. "Lord preserve us! It's my lady, but she's a man! What witchery is this? For I saw her, just two days ago, board my master's ship and sail away. Her and her little babe, too. What have you done with the babe?"

"Babe? This woman we are looking for had no child." Orsino was disappointed.

"Orsino? Might I have a word with you in private?" Sebastien pulled the duke to one side and began speaking to him in a low voice.

The old woman sidled up to Antonio. Being nearly deaf herself, she did not believe that anyone could hear her, either.

“Don’t you worry, sir,” she nearly shouted. “I’ll not betray you to that tyrant. If I was you, though, I’d clear out of here before himself returns. He’s mighty unhappy with that highborn woman you wished on him.”

“What are you chattering about, you old hag?” Antonio replied, as he began backing away, towards the thick wood that bordered Salazar’s back garden.

But the sergeant was standing nearby, and stepped into Antonio’s path.

“Hold up there, bucko,” he said with a grin. “I think my lord Orsino will want a word with you.”

\* \* \*

Orsino ordered his men to make camp for the night. They would gather what supplies they could from the town, and set out the next morning in pursuit of the duchess and the heir. Antonio was bound at the wrists and tethered to a tree like a mad dog, some distance from the camp. A single soldier stood guard over him. Sebastien approached and sent the soldier back to his comrades. Antonio struggled to his feet and stood facing his friend.

“I can hardly credit what I have heard, Antonio,” said Sebastien, shaking his head sadly. “Is this the man who pulled me from the raging sea and saved my life, not so many years ago? How have we come to this? Are you one of the pirates, then?”

“You must believe, Sebastien, that I meant no harm to you, and I swear no harm will come to your sister. All my malice has been against Orsino, who is a damned tyrant, though he is your brother and your sister’s husband. He would have imprisoned me years ago but for your intervention, and it seems he will finally work his will. If you will consider the wish of a doomed man, dear Sebastien, I would wish that you remember me as the man who saved you that night, who showed you hospitality and friendship. Do not remember me as I am now, in disgrace.”

Sebastien put his hands on his friend’s shoulders and looked into his eyes. “I cannot help but remember the great service you did me that night,” he said. “And in remembrance of that, I do this now.” He quickly slid his hands down Antonio’s arms and, with the blade he concealed in one hand, cut the cords that bound the captive’s hands. “Go now. Take yourself off into the recesses of this island. My brother is in too great a hurry to pursue you. He will forgive me, I think, for setting you free; but were I you, I would set a course henceforth far from the boundaries of Illyria, for he will never forgive you. Farewell, Antonio. I forgive you for what you have done to my sister, for I believe you meant her no harm, but we cannot be friends as before. Go now, and do not return.”

Sebastien turned and quickly walked away, back towards the light of the camp fires. Antonio watched him for a moment, then quickly melted away into the shadows of the wood.

The fleet sailed out of the harbor at first light, Orsino and Sebastien standing side by side on the deck of the flagship.

“Captain,” Orsino shouted. “Set a course for Illyria!”



The voyage had been a remarkably easy one. Viola was able to spend much of the day on deck, playing with the baby in the bright sun and fresh ocean breeze. The crew, superstitiously reluctant at first to have a woman on board, warmed to the charming sight of the beautiful young mother with her infant. They whittled toys for him out of ivory and wood, and one sailor knitted him a tiny cap. Salazar spent most of the day on the foredeck, well away from his outspoken captive. Carlos always warned her when the captain began drinking heavily, a habit of his which generally prompted brooding followed by outbursts of violence; she spent those nights with the door to her cabin safely bolted.

She became a special favorite of Salazar's first mate, a grizzled old veteran with countless tattoos and only two fingers on his left hand. She reminded him of his own daughter, had she lived. Vincente had her cabin furnished with the softest blankets and richest furnishings that the ship could provide. He often sat with her on deck, telling tales of his youth in the countryside of Illyria, while Salazar watched in disgust from his lonely vantage point. Viola was unfailingly gracious in response to these attentions, betraying no hint of the fear she felt. The ferocity of the Atlantian pirates was legendary in this part of the world; her father had fought them in Messaline, as had Orsino in Illyria. The pirates plundered wherever they could, showing no preference for a particular nation. They were skilled sailors, fearless soldiers, and, it was said, pitiless captors. Viola felt surrounded by them, as she had not in her quiet room in Salazar's house. Any false move on her part might bring provoke hideous consequences for her and the child.

"Pardon, Duchess." Vincente was standing beside her, holding a tray in his ruined hands. "I thought you might like some tea. The air is a bit chilly today." He poured the tea into a tin cup, the least battered of those on board, and carefully added cream and sugar. He held the baby while Viola drank.

"This one may grow up to be a great admiral," he said to her. "A child who grows accustomed to the motion of a ship when he is young will feel at home there for the rest of his life. This little babe has taken to it quickly, he seems to grow stronger every day in this good sea air."

Viola did not reply. She could not imagine a worse profession for her son than to be at perpetual risk of his life on this treacherous sea. For she did not trust this calm weather. Every cloud hid bolts of lightning, and every swell had the potential to become a towering menace. She was anxious to reach the safety of land.

They sailed into Illyrian waters on the morning of the seventh day. Salazar knew better than to sail directly into the harbor beneath Orsino's castle. He knew the exact location of every cannon that was positioned to defend the

docks and the ships that anchored there, and the number of soldiers that could be housed in the castle barracks. He steered his ship instead up the coast, then maneuvered it into a tiny cove. A small house hid among the trees that grew right up the shore, and a man emerged from it at the signal of Vincente's whistle. He waved at them, then disappeared back inside. Salazar ordered the boat lowered. He summoned Vincente and another sailor to row ashore and learn if it was safe for them here.

The Atlantian agent who lived in the house informed them that Orsino had sailed away several weeks ago with nearly the entire garrison. He did not know if any word had been received, as there was hardly anyone to ask. A tiny remnant of the household guard was all that remained, and they stayed within the walls. The hills surrounding the castle had been silent. Salazar received this news with great satisfaction.

"We will leave the lady at the castle gate, then make haste to return home. Orsino has no doubt sailed to Messaline for news. Antonio will send them in the wrong direction, as we agreed. We may profit from this disaster yet, with Orsino leagues away and the coastline unguarded. Vincente, take four men and our agent, Marco, and escort the lady home. I will sail up the coast a bit to see what fruit is ripe for picking. We will return here in three days to retrieve you. Do not be late."

Viola and her child were lowered in the boat and rowed ashore, along with all of their belongings. Marco produced a broken-down wagon and a skeletal horse in which he proposed to transport the duchess home. Vincente directed the men to create a bed in the wagon from pine boughs covered with blankets. Viola was settled into this fragrant couch, and the long, jolting journey began. As they traveled through the thick woods, Vincente related the news of Orsino's absence. Viola was not surprised, but she did not want to return to that great echoing castle with her baby. She begged Vincente to take her to her sister-in-law's house, instead.

"It is not very much farther, and it is not guarded, which surely makes it a more attractive destination. You do not want to confront any of the household guard with an abducted duchess in your possession. I doubt that they would give you a chance to explain your errand."

Vincente considered her proposal. He had not approved of Salazar's plan from the beginning, though he had not opposed his captain. It seemed cowardly to dump Viola unceremoniously at her front door, then run away before anyone saw them. On the other hand, he had no desire to engage Orsino's guard in battle. His men were experts at sea battle, but inexperienced on land; and there were only four of them. So he agreed to Viola's request, and Marco turned his sickly nag towards Olivia's house. As they left the cover of the forest and began to travel through more

open lands, Viola could see the familiar battlements of her home upon the heights. She recalled the times that she had made the journey between these two houses, in many seasons and upon many errands. Perhaps Sebastien had returned home to impart the news of Viola's capture and had remained here instead of going with Orsino. She longed to see them again, her brother and his wife.

They received many curious stares as they traveled up the drive to Olivia's house, but no one questioned them. Everything was very quiet. Viola noticed that the hedges looked overgrown, and sheep were grazing in the flowers while their shepherd dozed under a tree. Vincente helped her down from the wagon. Viola, who expected to find Gregory waiting for her on the steps, had to knock on the great front door. Several minutes passed before the door swung open. Gregory stared at her for several moments in disbelief before he could speak.

"Lady Viola!" he finally managed. "You have returned – but who are these people? Did not the Duke rescue you from the pirates? Is Lord Sebastien with you?"

Viola raised her hand wearily to stop the flood of questions.

"Enough, Gregory! I must see your mistress. These men have been good enough to escort me. Please see to their horse and feed them."

"Yes, madame, of course. Please forgive me. Juliet! Take the duchess to the countess at once. I will look after the gentlemen myself."

Viola shifted the sleeping baby in her arms and followed the maid up the stairs to Olivia's private rooms.

"Is the countess ill, that she is not downstairs today?" Viola asked.

"Oh no, my lady. That is, not any more ill than usual. She has not come downstairs since the duke left."

The maid glanced quickly back at Viola, to see how she received this news, but Viola's expression showed only mild sympathy and great exhaustion.

She was surprised, though, when she was shown into the sitting room, to find it very dim. The curtains were drawn and only a few candles served to lighten the gloom. Finally, Viola was able to make out Olivia, seated on a divan. Dressed in black from head to toe, Olivia was a darker shadow in a room of shadows. Viola hoped that the baby would be able to breathe in the close air. She handed him to Juliet

"Here, take him down to cook and get him a bit of warm water and milk if he wakes. I will call when I need you. Sister, is that you?" she spoke quietly as she approached the reclining figure. "It is I, Viola. I have much to tell you, but is not my brother with you? Where is Sebastien?"

At the mention of her husband's name, Olivia shrieked and threw herself full length upon the divan. Viola hurried to her side.

"Olivia! What means this? Has some misfortune fallen upon Sebastien?"

"How can you ask that of me? Did you not know that he would pursue your captors, and have they not killed him or the sea swallowed him up? Oh, do not speak to me of Sebastien, my lost love!"

After a great deal of gentle prompting, Viola extracted the story of Sebastien's letter from Olivia. Sebastien had gone after her immediately then, and had not been heard from since. Orsino, however, wrote regularly to inform Olivia of his progress and his plans. Olivia showed Viola the letters, and allowed her to open the curtains over one window to read them. It seemed that he had an idea of where the pirates had their lair, and was proceeding there directly, instead of going first to Messaline, as Salazar had predicted. The last letter was dated a week ago; he must have arrived there already, and found her gone. He might conceivably be returning home even now, Viola thought. Olivia's sobbing interrupted her thoughts.

"Sister, why do you grieve? There has been no word of my brother's doom, and you have promising news from the duke. It is unlucky to behave as though both have already been lost. Come now, let us have some light."

"No! I lost my beloved brother some years ago, for whose death I mourned until my dear Sebastien lifted the gloom that brooded over this house. I am familiar with the awful pangs of grief caused by a death unlooked-for, therefore I shall mourn him now, so not to be surprised when the news finally comes. Now I must leave you, dear sister, for it is my prayer-time. The priest awaits me."

Olivia drifted out of the sitting room, into the still darker confines of the small room where she received the comfort of her household priest. Viola felt suffocated in the warm dimness, and felt momentarily the seductive call of Olivia's gloom. She put it aside and went to seek her child. The baby was in the garden, being admired by Fabian the gardener.

"Welcome back, my lady," he touched his cap with one hand, the other being pulled at by tiny fingers. "We did almost despair of seeing you again. Those pirates are wondrous fierce, so it's said. Bring you any news of my lord Sebastien or my lord the duke?"

"No, Fabian. I am just returned from the pirate's stronghold, and have heard no news save that Olivia gave me. Has she been thus for very long?"

“Oh my, yes, duchess,” interposed Juliet, the housemaid. “She collapsed when the letter from her husband came, which told of your terrible trouble. Then, when the duke sailed off to do battle, she got out her mourning and refused to speak to any save the priest. Have you spoken to her?”

“Yes, a little. Perhaps I can persuade her to give up some of these trappings of death, since no death has occurred. I shall speak to this priest and see what plan may be devised. Let me take that burden from you, Fabian. And get those sheep out of the flowers. The countess will not thank you, when she is herself once more, for letting things go so astray.”

She took the baby from him and returned to the house. It was there, sitting among the great fronds in the solarium, that she overheard the housekeeper and the cook, who had slipped into that quiet room for a private talk.

“She does not know then?”

“It seems not. She believes that our lady grieves but for a husband and a brother.”

“Some brother, he, to spend every waking moment in her company. Would I had a lover as attentive as that brother!”

“I think she grieves over-much for a brother. Such excess is more like one who has lost two husbands.”

“Sh! We should not speak of it so plainly.”

The voices moved out the door and faded away. Viola did not move, at first. She carefully weighed all that she had seen and heard since her arrival. She recalled her first acquaintance with Orsino, when, disguised as a boy, she had wooed Olivia in his name. He had made many protestations of the power of his love then, but had transferred that passion to Viola. Who could say if he might not change the object of his affections once again? The strength of habit was well-known, and he had loved Olivia for a long time before Viola washed ashore in Illyria. Men think us inconstant and fickle, Viola thought, but how long was I absent before his feelings changed like the wind in springtime? It blows gustily from one corner of the compass, but can quickly change round and blow just as strong from the opposite pole, in a matter of hours.

And like a gale in spring, anger blew through her, thrusting aside caution and prudence. She looked at the sleeping baby in her arms. For your sake, she thought, I shall not creep quietly away and accept this fate. If he has broken his vow to me, then his fortune and his station shall be forfeit. He shall find that it is no small matter to thus insult a daughter of Messaline. In that country, a man who breaks his word cannot rule; Orsino will discover that it was unwise to behave so and then to leave his citadel so thinly guarded.

She summoned Gregory, and directed him to order the carriage. She would return to the castle after all. She found Vincente and his men still at table, stuffing themselves with the unaccustomed richness of a countess' bounty.

"The air in this house is too dry. I am taking the child and returning to my own home. If you come with me, I shall give you some recompense for your kindness. You still have two days before your master returns for you. It will be safer to wait within the castle walls, where I can give witness to your good intentions." She pulled Vincente aside and whispered to him, "I would have a word with you in private, my friend. As you have shown me great kindness thus far, I would beg of you even more indulgence, to help me in the plan I have a mind to set in motion. Will you hear it?"

Viola explained the situation to Vincente as they traveled to the castle in Olivia's carriage, while the snoring pirates rattled along in the old wagon behind them. The old bandit saw the logic of her plan, for the hot blood of Messaline ran somewhat in his veins also. He agreed to give her what help he could until his master's return.

"The guards must not be hurt," she insisted. "We must take the castle by stealth, not force. They will let me in, then have your men overpower them and confine them in the dungeon. When the duke returns, he will find his own fortress held against him. He must be persuaded to surrender, for we cannot withstand a siege or a long battle."

"We might be able to surprise the guard, if there are really so few of them left here, but it will take more than five men to hold the castle against Orsino's men. If he does not return before Don Salazar, then I can persuade the rest of the crew to join us. It will not be safe to include Don Salazar in the plan, as he would no doubt be more interested in looting the treasury than in seeing justice done. I will think of some plan to divert him."

"Here is the gate," Viola said. "Sit there and say nothing while I speak to the guard."

\* \* \*

Orsino's fleet sailed into the harbor on a clear day with the sea as smooth as glass. The duke was meeting with his officers in the flagship's cabin when the ship suddenly rocked from some great impact. The officers came running up on deck to see what had happened.

"We've been fired on by the guns in the west tower, my lord!" shouted a sailor from the crow's nest. There was a great ragged hole in the quarterdeck, and a cannonball lodged in the galley. No one seemed to be hurt. Orsino signaled the other ships to stop while he assessed the situation. Had he been given false information? The old woman had said that Salazar was returning her to her home, had given up on the ransom. No doubt, Orsino thought grimly, the villain had decided to take his ransom after all. Sebastien joined him on deck.

“What news, brother? Think you that the pirates have taken the castle?”

“Aye, no doubt. And we cannot return their fire. My wife may still be with them – pray God she is, and not at the bottom of the sea. At any rate, well we know the range of those guns, and can move out of reach. But what then?”

“My lord!” shouted the watch again. “A boat approaches, with a single man.”

It was the captain of the household guard, rowing out to them in a small boat. He would not speak about the attack, but delivered a letter to Orsino. The duke read it through quickly, then again, then gripped Sebastien by the shoulder and hauled him down the officer’s mess. He handed Sebastien the letter.

“Read this carefully, brother. Do you agree that this is your sister’s hand? We must be very sure that it is no forgery, for that would be a trick very like Salazar. If it truly is her work, then what madness has possessed her? Have they poisoned her mind? You know her better than anyone on Earth. Help me to understand.”

Sebastien read the letter slowly, then examined the signature, the seal and the writing.

“I fear it is her work indeed,” he said. “It seems that some rumor has convinced her that you have broken faith. It is a custom in our country that a ruler who breaks faith with his subjects must be removed from power. As one of your subjects, she considered herself wronged, and has taken up arms in order to wrest your dukedom from you.”

“Preposterous! I have broken no vow, and I challenge anyone to prove otherwise. And if I had, is not this ruler in your custom entitled to defend himself? Must I be convicted simply upon the suspicions of a woman whose mind has been troubled, perhaps unto madness? Ah Viola, what have they done to you?”

Orsino ordered the fleet moved out of range of the castle guns. Sebastien offered to bear Orsino’s reply, but Orsino refused. If this was a ruse, then Sebastien would be in as great a danger within the castle as Orsino himself. The captain agreed to take the message, which refused Viola’s terms and demanded that she give up this nonsense and let him return home. He signed the letter, “your devoted husband.” He gave the messenger time to deliver the reply, then raised sail and moved cautiously forward. A well-aimed shot across his bow stopped this advance.

They remained thus for several days, but their supplies were running very low. Sebastien came to Orsino in the main cabin to discuss the situation.

“You must surrender to her, Orsino.”

“What? I, surrender to my own wife! That will only encourage these mad fantasies, make it seem that I am admitting guilt. I have done nothing wrong.”

“I know that, but it is the only way that you can make her listen to you. Surrender, give in to her; and only then reason with her. Do not argue over the justice of her actions, but argue the rightness of your own. No doubt she too is searching for an end to this stalemate. You admit that I know her mind; I believe that she is willing to listen to reason, but demands first that her anger be appeased.”

“It is hard counsel to take, Sebastien,” growled Orsino. “But I will consider it.”

\* \* \*

Viola sat in the breakfast room, gloomily picking at a roll. She looked up at the entrance of the second mate, wondering what new difficulties had developed.

“Lady, what would you have us do? My lord Orsino stands at the gate, unarmed, with a white flag. He requests an audience with you.”

Viola was triumphant, anxious, amazed. She had never known Orsino to surrender without a fight. Was it a trick?

“Very well, I will see him, but him alone. Do not allow any of his men to accompany him.”

She received him in the war room, a great echoing chamber with stone-flagged floor and an enormous table piled with maps. All of the chairs had been removed save one, and Viola sat in it like a queen. Orsino strode into the room, flanked by two grim-looking pirates. He stopped before his wife.

“Good afternoon, my lord. You wished to speak to me?” She held her head very high and still, and looked directly into his dark eyes. There was no expression in them that she could read.

“Thank you for receiving me, Viola. I have come to surrender to you. I will not risk the lives of my men any further. If my dukedom must be forfeit to your anger, then it shall be. I submit myself to your will.”

“Very well. I have no desire to rule Illyria, but if the duke cannot keep his word, then he is not fit to rule.”

“What word have I broken?” Orsino was on the defensive now. “You wanted to return to your family, and I let you go. I promised to watch out for Olivia, and I did so. As soon as I got word of your abduction, I set out to find you. What have I done wrong?” His voice rose, and the guards moved forward. Viola waved them back.

“Leave us please,” she instructed. They hesitated, then retreated to the door when she glared at them. “Yes, you allowed me to return home, and looked after Olivia very well. When my captors returned me, I heard of how well you looked after her. When first I met you, you claimed to love her with a love as hungry as the sea. Now let that sea



wash over her, return you to Olivia. My brother and I will stay here and console each other over the fickleness of Illyrians.”

“You should not speak for your brother. He would not give up Olivia so easily as you give me up. He would not thank you, I think, for arranging his life this way. I do not know what evil rumors have reached your ears, lady, but know this: I love Olivia but as a sister. She entertained me as much to amuse herself as to make her forget her melancholy at Sebastien’s absence. And so did I allow myself to be amused. There was no breach of faith, no broken word. Look at me now, and tell me that you believe the whispers of servants and evil-minded rogues above your own husband.”

Viola looked at him, and weighed his words. She knew their value, knew what it cost him to utter them. She remembered Olivia, incoherent with grief; the steward swollen with self-importance. She thought of the babe lying asleep in his crib, who had not yet met his noble father, and the anger that had been her strength and her companion fell away.

“My lord, I accept your surrender and I offer you my own in return. Let us leave off this war, and commence with reparations at once. If you will come with me, I will show you a peace offering that will do much to repair the damage wrought by this misunderstanding.”

When they embraced, the guards moved forward, sensing a threat. They halted at the sight of tears glistening on the duke’s face, and quietly retreated into the corridor.

“That’s the last of that fight,” one said to the other. “We’d best clear out before the troops return.”

“Aye, no doubt,” replied his companion. “But let us clear out by way of the armory. There’s a sword there that I’d fancy for my own belt.”

And so, by twos and threes, the pirates made their way back to the hidden ship. When the troops returned, they found an empty larder and a considerably reduced stock of weaponry. The butchers and the swordmakers had employment for many weeks. The bakers and the seamstresses were busy as well, for the duke and duchess held a grand christening at which they named Count Sebastien and Countess Olivia as godparents. On a sunny May morning, all proceeded to the chapel to see the child blessed by the priest, then spent a golden day in feasting, dancing and drinking the health of the heir and all the company.

At Viola’s urging, a treaty was negotiated with Don Salazar’s Atlantians, and the “Free People” became lawful merchants in truth as well as in boast. Having no battles to detain him, then, Orsino accompanied Viola the

following year to Messaline, where he was charmed by the hospitality of the contessa. Thus, a peace between the duke and duchess resulted in a peace for all Illyria, which extended even to the high seas.

## ❧ Epilogue ❧

Another winter. Storms still buffet the fortress on the cliff, but the evenings before the fireplace are more lively now. Orsino rarely ventures to the edge of the precipice to test himself against the wind. His hair has acquired a sprinkling of frost and, as though it chilled him, he keeps closer to the fireside. On this evening, he sits at a small table with his secretary Godolfo. Orsino is relating an episode from his youth while the secretary records it for the Duke's memoir. Viola has heard this particular story before. She puts down her book and takes a heavy shawl from the back of her chair. She rests her hand for an instant on the Duke's shoulder as she passes him, and he reaches up to touch her fingers without interrupting his tale.

On her way to the music room, she passes the open door of library and stops when she hears voices within. There is the singsong rhythm of old Feste, grown querulous with age. Ah, young master, it grows late, and an old man grows weary. Once an advisor to Olivia, he had been persuaded to serve as tutor to Orsino's children, on the strength of the superiority of Orsino's cook. There, too, is the piping tone of Viola's oldest son. Tell it again, he pleads, it's not so late as that. Only this time (the voice grows a touch imperious), more of the pirates and less of that weepy kissing rot. Pirates and battles, if you please.

Very well, the old man sighs. One more time, and then our play is done, and off to the nursery with you. I am just a poor old man, trying to please as best I can, but this cold rain gets into my bones and makes me weary. But it's not raining, protested his young charge. Ah lad, don't you know that it rains every day? Some days its rains on me and some days it rains on you, but "the rain it raineth every day," as the song says. Now, shall we begin with the party again?